

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 AF-06 ARA-06 EUR-12 NEA-10 CIAE-00

DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01

PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 NSCE-00 SSO-00 USIE-00 INRE-00

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O P 150520Z JAN 76

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INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY CANBERRA PRIORITY

AMCONSUL HONG KONG PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY MANILA PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON PRIORITY

CINCPAC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 KUALA LUMPUR 0281

NOFORN

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT MY

SUBJ: DATUK HUSSEIN ONN SUCCEEDS TUN ABDUL RAZAK AS
MALAYSIAN PRIME MINISTER

REF: STATE 9037 (NOTAL) (DTG 141704Z JAN 76)

1. SUMMARY: DATUK HUSSEIN BIN DATUK ONN WAS SWORN IN AS
PRIME MINISTER OF MALAYSIA BY THE YANG DIPERTUAN AGUNG (KING)
THIS MORNING. HE IS REPORTED TO HAVE RECEIVED PROMOTION
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FROM DEPUTY PRESIDENT TO PRESIDENT OF THE RULING UNITED

MALAYS NATIONAL ORGANIZATION LAST NIGHT. IT IS NOT KNOWN WHO HE WILL APPOINT AS DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER, BUT THERE IS SPECULATION THAT IT WILL EITHER BE THE PRESENT MINISTER OF EDUCATION, DR. MAHATHIR BIN MOHAMED, OR THE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT, ENCIK ABDUL GHAFAR BABA. IT IS ALSO NOT KNOWN WHETHER HE WILL ANNOUNCE THE NEW DPM AND/OR NEW CABINET TODAY OR WAIT UNTIL AFTER THE FUNERAL OF FORMER PRIME MINISTER RAZAK, BUT RELIABLE OBSERVERS FEEL THAT THERE WILL BE A SUBSTANTIAL CHANGE IN THE CABINET AND THAT MANY RAZAK PROTOGES WILL LEAVE. THE TRANSITION IN THE CABINET IS EXPECTED TO BE PEACEFUL AND ALL PRESENT SIGNS INDICATE A WILLINGNESS ON THE PART OF UMNO TO ACCEPT DATUK HUSSEIN'S LEADERSHIP. ONE DISTURBING NOTE, HOWEVER, IS THE ANNOUNCEMENT BY SELANGOR CHIEF MINISTER HARUN IDRIS, CURRENTLY STANDING TRIAL FOR CORRUPTION, THAT HE HAS CANCELLED HIS "LEAVE" AND IS RETURNING TO OFFICE AS OF TODAY. END SUMMARY.

2. ACTING PRIME MINISTER DATUK HUSSEIN ONN ANNOUNCED THE DEATH IN LONDON OF FORMER PRIME MINISTER TUN RAZAK AT 10:45 P.M. JAN 14 LOCAL TIME. SCHOOLS WERE DECLARED

CLOSED TODAY (JAN 15) AND TOMORROW (JAN 16) AND THE GOVERNMENT WILL CLOSE ITS OFFICES FROM NOON TODAY THROUGH TOMORROW AFTERNOON. ACCORDING TO PROTOCOL OFFICE AT MFA, TUN RAZAK'S BODY WILL ARRIVE HERE FROM LONDON AT BETWEEN 6:00 AND 6:30 P.M. THIS EVENING, WILL LIE IN STATE AT PARLIAMENT FROM 10:30 A.M. TO 11:30 A.M. TOMORROW AND WILL BE BURIED IN THE MAUSOLEUM BESIDE THE NATIONAL MOSQUE IN K.L. TOMORROW AFTER NOON PRAYERS. FOREIGN REPRESENTATIVES AND DIPLOMATIC CORPS WILL ATTEND AT THE AIRPORT, THE PARLIAMENT AND PROBABLY AT THE INTERMENT. AUSTRALIAN HIGH COMMISSION REPORTS PRIME MINISTER FRAZIER, FORMER PM WHITLAM, AND FOREIGN MINISTER PEACOCK WILL LEAD A FOURTEEN-MAN DELEGATION. JAPANESE EMBASSY REPORTS GOJ TRYING TO MAKE ARRANGEMENTS FOR FONMIN MIAZAWA TO FLY HERE AS REPRESENTATIVE OF JAPAN. NEW ZEALAND AND CANADA WILL BE REPRESENTED BY AMBASSADORS. UK BY A MINISTER.
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3. HUSSEIN ONN MOVED QUICKLY LAST NIGHT (JAN 14) TO GATHER SENIOR UMNO OFFICIALS AT HIS RESIDENCE WHERE THEY CONFIRMED HIS ASSUMPTION OF THE PRESIDENCY OF THE RULING PARTY. HE TOOK THE OATH AS PRIME MINISTER BEFORE THE YANG DIPERTUAN AGUNG (KING) THIS MORNING AT 9:30. IT IS NOT YET KNOWN WHETHER HE WILL ANNOUNCE HIS SELECTION OF A NEW DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER TODAY OR AFTER THE

FUNERAL, BUT THERE IS SPECULATION THAT SIGNIFICANT CHANGES WILL BE MADE IN THE CABINET SINCE MANY OF THOSE AROUND RAZAK, PARTICULARLY THE "KELANTAN MAFIA" LED BY TENGKU RAZALEIGH AND ABDULLAH AHMAD, ARE NOT FAVORITES OF HUSSEIN ONN. MOST LIKELY CANDIDATES FOR THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTERSHIP ARE EDUCATION MINISTER MAHATHIR AND AGRICULTURE MINISTER GHAFAR BABA. GHAFAR BY VIRTUE OF HIS SENIORITY IN THE CABINET AND IN UMNO WOULD SEEM TO HAVE FIRST RIGHTS TO THE JOB BUT SOME OBSERVERS FEEL THAT DATUK HUSSEINI WOULD RATHER HAVE THE MORE STRAIGHTFORWARD AND PERSONALLY HONEST MAHATHIR, DESPITE HIS CHAUVINISTIC TENDENCIES, THAN THE SOMEWHAT LIMITED, OLD POL GHAFAR, WHOSE ACCUMULATION OF WEALTH WHEN HE WAS CHIEF MINISTER OF MALACCA IS WELL KNOWN. ONE MAY ALSO GUESS THAT HUSSEIN WILL ADVANCE THE FORTUNES OF PRAOH INDUSTRIES MINISTER DATUK MUSA HITAM, POSSIBLY MAKING HIM FINANCE MINISTER, BECAUSE OF HIS INTELLECTUAL ABILITIES AND SOUND GRASP OF GOVERNMENT AND FINANCE, AS WELL AS THE FACT HE IS FROM JOHORE, HUSSEIN'S HOME STATE. ON OTHER HAND, RAZALEIGH AND COMPANY MAY GO INTO ECLIPSE FOR THE TIME BEING AT LEAST, WHICH WILL PLEASE MANY IN THE GOVT AND MOST FOREIGN FIRMS.

4. WHILE THERE ARE THOSE WHO FEAR THAT HUSSEIN ONN IS TOO "TIMID" FOR HIS NEW POSITION, OTHERS SAY THAT WHILE HE IS RETIRING BY NATURE, AND HE HAS DUTIFULLY ACTED THE ROLE OF RAZAK'S SHADOW, HE IS A MAN OF GREAT DETERMINATION AND ONCE HE MAKES UP HIS MIND HE CANNOT EASILY BE SWAYED. THIS IS IN MARKED CONTRAST TO THE MORE OUTGOING RAZAK WHO WAS SOMETIMES ACCUSED OF ACTING ON THE ADVICE OF THE LAST PERSON
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WHO HAD HIS EAR. HUSSEIN ALSO IS BELIEVED TO BE MORE PRO-WESTERN, LESS IN FAVOR OF NON-ALIGNMENT, AND GENERALLY TOLERANT ON RACIAL ISSUES, ALL OF WHICH COULD BE A BIG PLUS IN THE PRESENT SITUATION OF HEATED COMMUNAL RELATIONS AND INCREASING INSURGENCY.

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ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2247

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK PRIORITY

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 KUALA LUMPUR 0281

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5. THE BIG QUESTION IS WHETHER HUSSEIN WILL MOVE SWIFTLY TO SHOW HIS AUTHORITY NOW THAT HE HAS THE LEVERS OF POWER IN HIS HANDS. CERTAINLY, ON THE FACE OF IT, HE WOULD SEEM TO BE IN A POSITION TO DO SO. HE IS THE SON OF THE FATHER OF MALAYAN NATIONALISM AND HIMSELF PLAYED A ROLE AS IMPORTANT IN UMNO'S EARLY DAYS AS DID TUN RAZAK. MANY UMNO RANK AND FILE ADMIRE HIS HONESTY AND RESPECT HIS HARD WORK SINCE HE JOINED THE CABINET AFTER THE MAY 1969 RACIAL RIOTS; WORK FOR WHICH HE HAS ASKED NO PERSONAL CREDIT OR GAIN. FURTHERMORE IT HAS LONG BEEN ACKNOWLEDGED THAT IT IS JOHORE'S TURN TO HOLD THE PRIME MINISTERSHIP (THE TENGKU IS FROM KEDAH AND RAZAK WAS FROM PAHANG, THE THREE KEY STATES FOR UMNO). (IT IS ALSO WORTH NOTING

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THAT A SIGNIFICANT PROPORTION OF SENIOR ARMY OFFICERS, INCLUDING DATUK HUSSEIN'S BROTHER BRIGADIER JA'AFAR ONN, ARE JOHORIAN.)

6. ANOTHER QUESTION IS WHETHER, EVEN IF HE SEEKS TO SHAPE THINGS TO HIS OWN CONSERVATIVE BUT CONSTRUCTIVE PATTERN, HUSSEIN'S HEALTH WILL PERMIT HIM TO REMAIN IN OFFICE LONG ENOUGH TO COMPLETE HIS WORK. HE HAD A VERY SERIOUS HEART ATTACK IN MARCH 1975 FOR WHICH HE WAS HOSPITALIZED AND THERE HAVE BEEN MANY RUMORS THAT HE HAS BEEN ADVISED TO RETIRE FROM GOVERNMENT TO PRESERVE HIS HEALTH. HOWEVER, SOME OBSERVERS ATTRIBUTE THESE RUMORS TO THE KELANTAN MAFIA AND CLAIM THAT HE HAS MADE A GOOD RECOVERY AND CAN STAND THE PACE.

7. ONE CHALLENGE TO HUSSEIN'S AUTHORITY COULD COME FROM SELANGOR CHIEF MINISTER DATUK HARUN IDRIS, CURRENTLY ON TRIAL FOR CORRUPTION, WHO SAID ONLY RECENTLY THAT HE WOULD NOT CONTEST THE PMSHIP WHILE RAZAK WAS ALIVE. HARUN HAS CANCELLED HIS ENFORCED LEAVE AND RESUMED HIS CHIEF MINISTERSHIP AS OF TODAY, APPARENTLY WITH THE AGREEMENT OF THE SULTAN OF SELANGOR. HOW HUSSEIN, WHO IS KNOWN TO HAVE PRESSED STRONGLY FOR HARUN'S INDICTMENT, HANDLES THIS SITUATION WILL BE SEEN AS A TEST OF HIS RESOLVE AND ABILITY TO WIELD THE TREMENDOUS POWERS AVAILABLE TO THE PM.

8. IT IS, OF COURSE, TOO EARLY TO SAY ANYTHING WITH CERTAINTY ABOUT THE FUTURE STYLE OF THE GOVT OR POLITICS OF MALAYSIA. IF, HOWEVER, DATUK HUSSEIN TAKES HOLD AND REMAINS IN GOOD HEALTH WE THINK THAT IT COULD BRING A PERIOD OF GOOD MANAGEMENT AND CONSERVATIVE POLICIES WHICH WOULD REDRESS SOME OF THE SLACKNESS IN ADMINISTRATION AND EMPHASIS ON WOING THE NON-ALIGNED WORLD THAT HAS CHARACTERIZED GOM PERFORMANCE OVER THE PAST TWO YEARS.
UNDERHILL

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